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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS IN EGYPT: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES,  
AUGUST 15 TO 21

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Summary  
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1. Commentaries this past week indicate that many educated Egyptians think that the presidential elections next month, even if the results are a foregone conclusion, will be a rehearsal for the parliamentary ones next November and a healthy experience for the body politic. The Ghad Party's supposed overture to the Muslim Brotherhood, and the statements of support for Mubarak issued by the Coptic Pope and the Sheikh of Al Azhar also prompted commentary last week. The complaint that the United States intends to monitor the upcoming elections continued to be a source of concern, most articles taking the position that Egyptians could handle an election by themselves without outside interference. All Egyptian media followed the withdrawal of settlers from Gaza with rapt attention but commentaries on the significance of the events were few and muted. End summary.

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Presidential elections are a rehearsal for the  
parliamentary ones and are good for the body politic  
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2. Dream TV, on August 21, hosted Noman Gomaa, the Wafd Party chairman, who noted that although it would be very difficult for him to win in the presidential elections, his party would concentrate its real efforts on victories in the parliamentary ones. On Egyptian TV's popular "Al Bayt Betak" (Make Yourself at Home) talk show of August 21, a university professor praised the elections as being a "good experience" for the Egyptian people. On August 16, The vice editor of pro-government Al Musawwar magazine (circulation: 50,000) said on TV Channel Two's talk show Milaffat Maftouha (Open Files) that talk about reform is no longer confined to intellectual or elite circles but is now widespread among all people. On August 15, a columnist in opposition Al Wafd newspaper (circulation: 180,000) said that the opposition parties, even if they think the election results might be a forgone conclusion, should view the elections as an opportunity to win their base among ordinary people. In pro-government Al Akhbar newspaper (circulation: 780,000), on August 21, former editor-in-chief Galal Doweidar asserted that the empowerment of the people is the main benefit of the presidential elections. Echoing the same sentiment, an unsigned editorial in pro-government Al Gomhouriya (circulation: 200,000), August 19, argued that the upcoming "free" elections would enable the political parties to gauge their weight on the street and work on increasing their share of the votes in future elections.

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Religion should stay out of it  
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3. Al Gomhouriya newspaper, on August 15, reported that Ghad Party Chairman Ayman Nour had visited Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mahdy Akef to solicit support in the upcoming elections. In an obvious reference to this visit, moderate independent paper Nahdet Misr (circulation: 20,000), on August 15, criticized presidential candidates (i.e., Ayman Nour) who "deceived" the public when they claimed to be "liberals" who rejected playing the religion card in politics, but who went to kiss the hand of the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, all the while declaring that they wanted to establish an American-style system of government. Al Gomhouriya, on August 19, noted that the Supreme Mufti of Al-Azhar had praised Egypt's style of democracy and had remarked that anyone who does not vote would be considered a "sinner." On the TV talk show El Haqiqa (The Truth), August 21, a prominent Coptic intellectual said that any involvement in politics by religious officials was

wrong, including Coptic Pope Shenouda's announcement of support for Mubarak.

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No need for foreign election monitoring; we can do it ourselves  
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14. On Egyptian TV Channel One's Malaff Khass (Special File) talk show, August 15, well-known writer Salah Montasser said Egypt's elections would be a model for the whole region, and that international supervision is unnecessary as there are many TV channels that have trained their reporters to cover such events, not to mention international TV coverage, press, and "secret elements" that surely would be present. Al Gomhouriya, on August 15, quoted the spokesman of the Presidential Election Commission saying that every candidate has the right to appoint a deputy in every polling station. On August 20, pro-government newspaper Al Akhbar (circulation: 780,000) and Al Wafd newspaper reported that the Judges' Club had sent a memorandum to the Presidential Election Commission stressing the need to assign a judge for every ballot box in all polling stations. The Club also said it is the right of civil society groups to monitor the electoral process. In the same article, Al Akhbar and Al Wafd also reported that the head of the Judges' Club had refused to meet with a U.S. Congressional delegation and had also condemned American attempts to "check up" on democracy in Egypt and "teach it" to Egyptians. (Note: No such meeting had been requested. End note.) Al Akhbar, on August 20, proclaimed that all Egyptian presidential candidates, including President Mubarak, had rejected international monitoring of elections and that they were all confident that the elections would be fair without any foreign supervision. Pan-Arab newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat (estimated circulation in Egypt: 5,000) reported on August 19 that some civil society groups had decided to file a lawsuit with the Administrative Court against the head of the Presidential Election Commission for turning down their request to monitor the elections.

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Gaza withdrawal; not such a big deal  
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15. Although media coverage was extensive, commentaries on the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza were relatively few and muted. On August 15, Nile TV's talk show "Open to Question" focused on events in Gaza. The prime guest, Ambassador Fathi El-Shazli, said that the withdrawal was "significant" but was not of "historical" significance. He opined that even though Gaza was tantamount to a "prison" for the Palestinians, it would nevertheless provide them with scope to improve their situation. In Al Wafd newspaper (circulation: 180,000), on August 20, anti-U.S. and anti-Israel columnist Sanaa Al-Said made light of the Gaza withdrawal. She said that Israel would not withdraw from any of the other occupied territories and that an unsupportable burden would be put on the shoulders of the Palestinians that would frustrate their efforts to oblige Israel to withdraw from the rest of the territories.

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